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SUBJECT: NINEWA: HAMDANIYA MAYOR ARGUES THE SKY IS NOT
FALLING

Classified By: PRT Ninewa Leader Alex Laskaris for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

¶1. (C) Summary: The Assyrian Christian mayor of Ninewa,s Hamdaniya district told us that security in his community is sufficient and that there is less to the debate over whether to affiliate with the Kurdish region or Ninewa province than meets the eye. Mayor Nissan Karumi professes no allegiance to any political party, and contempt for all of them. He argued that all Hamdaniya,s communities are capable of coexistence, and voiced no objection to Kurdish-dominated sub-districts of Hamdaniya joining the Kurdish region. The mayor offered a standard list of grievances against the provincial government but said the problems are systemic in nature. End summary.

¶2. (C) PRT leader paid a courtesy call on Nissan Karumi, mayor of the Hamdaniya district of Ninewa Province, on September 2. Karumi cleared up one mystery right off the bat: &Hamdaniya8 is the district,s official name, &Qarakosh8 is the Ottoman name that most people use, and he himself uses its Assyrian name of &Begdadaa,eh8. Karumi said that Hamdaniya district had 150,000 people in 1997, a number that has grown by some 4,000 IDP families since 2003. He said that the newcomers are mainly Christian IDPs from other parts of Iraq, including Mosul. Other groups of IDPs include Shebak and a smaller number of Yezidis. He thought the district was 80-90 percent Christian, with a Sunni Arab community centered in Nimrud sub-district and one small Turkman community.

¶3. (C) Karumi said that the security situation in Qarakosh town and the broader Hamdaniya district is satisfactory. He attributed this to the fact that the area was comprised of close-knit communities in which strangers were easily identified. He allowed that the KRG-Ninewa green line passed through his district, but said that was a dispute among politicians with little impact on the daily life of the community. Karumi said that men working as private security guards filled the vacuum created by the fall of the regime and have gone from protecting churches to a broader law and order role. The fact that their salaries come from KRG Finance Minister Sarkis Aghajan bothered him, but only insofar as the personnel were accruing no pension rights or other benefits. He said he hoped that they would all be integrated into the police, but noted that &these things take a long time in Iraq.8

¶4. (C) We asked Karumi where he stood on the issue of remaining in Ninewa Province or joining the KRG. He responded that if every other group in Iraq is demanding autonomy, he might as well do the same. As a lawyer, he said, he knows that this is not possible, but hopes that by demanding it for himself he could show other groups what a bad idea it really is. Karumi said that this dispute was between politicians and political parties, explaining that he is not the former and not a member of the latter.

¶5. (C) Karumi explained that a District Mayor is not a political position; the mayor is a town administrator who

controls no resources. He got the job, he said, because he was a prominent insurance lawyer who coalition forces and others approached to take the position. He lamented the over-centralization of power in Iraq, asking how it was possible to govern a country in which every decision) no matter how small) needs a minister,s or director general,s approval.

¶16. (C) Karumi said that there are some 250 poultry farmers in the district who are interested in working together. He complained that the farmers are not getting the support they need from the government, mainly feedstock, and lack the ability to get their goods to market in a systematic way. We asked if the farmers had an association and, if so, are they looking for credit in order to run businesses on a strictly commercial basis. Karumi said that the entrepreneurial skills and instincts do not exist in the district to operate in this way; he complained that there are 10,000 college graduates in the district, all of whom think the government owes them a desk job where they can make money without doing any work.

¶17. (C) Comment: Hamdaniya resembles other Christian communities in Ninewa that we visit regularly, enjoying relative prosperity, order, and security. Karumi is unusual among Christian leaders, however, in acknowledging that Christians have attained a degree of normalcy following violent uprooting from Mosul and other parts of Iraq.
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